DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 033 403 CG 004 472

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TITLE Room to Grow: "Something Special for All Kids."
INSTITUTION Philadelphia School District, Pa.
Pub Date [69]
Note 7p.

EDRS Price EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.45
Descriptors *Career Planning, Counseling Programs, Educational Objectives, *Elementary School Students, Family Attitudes, Grade 5, Grade 6, *Guidance Programs, Occupational Guidance, *Self Concept, *Vocational Counseling

Abstract

ROOM TO GROW, an elementary school career guidance program grew out of frustration with urban problems of education and was shaped by contemporary research in career development theory. Career choice is viewed as developmental. It is also believed that life histories cannot be predicted and that a career is something that gives purpose to life. Experiences are provided which give more attention to the elementary school child's perception of himself and the image of the person he would like to become. Aspects taken into consideration are: (1) attitudes and values toward work, (2) socio-economic level, (3) educational expectations, and (4) self-concept. ROOM TO GROW is conducted once a week for 7,000 fifth and sixth graders in Philadelphia. The program, supervised by three guidance consultants, consists of 25-30 weekly sessions of 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Some sessions are teacher-led, some have guest speakers, some are tours, and others are guidance sessions. The objectives of the program are: (1) to improve self-confidence, (2) to provide a wide range of career experiences, and (3) to develop a desirable approach to the process of career choice. (Author/KJ)

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ROOM TO GROW
"Something Special For All Kids"

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ROOM TO GROW, an elementary school career guidance program grew out of frustration with urban problems of education and was shaped by contemporary research in career development theory. By listening to children, and especially the drop-out, it became evident that career guidance in schools had to begin earlier than the secondary grades. The following comments of children are representative of some of the feelings about themselves and school: "I won't be able to be a policeman because my father is allergic to policemen." "I look like a boy who steals","I won't be able to be an astronaut because my family doesn't have the money to send me to college." And the drop-outs, of which there are still thousands in each big city: Jim, a six foot, handsome Negro youth who left school in his eleventh year because, as he put it, "I felt like the smallest boy in the class" (Jim was reading at a 3rd grade level) or Ronald, who dropped out after drifting through 10 years of school, said, "There ought to be something special for all the kids to do at school - something to make them feel important, whether they're smart or not."

This was the frustration! How do you go about beating the odds? Well, in recent years guidance specialists have been exploring old definitions of vocational guidance and doing research in career choice. Many of their findings have had an impact on new approaches to vocational guidance. Donald Super has written that career choice evolves over a period of time and that choosing a career is a developmental process rather than an episode.[1] His definition of career choice, "an implementation of a self-concept", takes into account many other factors that affect career choice other than aptitude for the job. What effect would Jim's self concept ("I felt like the smallest boy in the class") have on his choice of a career? Ann Roe has found much evidence that suggests

that career choice is rooted to a considerable extent in childhood experiences and to parent-child relationships.[2] What then are the effects of poverty, broken homes, discrimination, and alienation on self-concept and eventually on a choice of one's life work? Robert Havinghurst has pointed out the importance of role models in the life of a child. Especially in the early years. He also says that people desire to achieve an ego-involving job.[3] Young people recognize this intuitively. When asked to define the difference between what we call a job and what we talk of as a career, they generally report something like the following: "A job is a short term thing, something you do from 9:00 to 5:00; on the other hand, a career is something you really want to do, something you do for the rest of your life."

Vocational guidance must be responsive to this new concept of career choice. Essentially the concept states that choosing a career is developmental, that life histories can not be predicted, and that a career is something that gives purpose to life. In recognition of this redefinition, vocational guidance must be developmental in its approach - beginning in the pre-school years and available at all stages of development.

This view of career development gives direction to the career guidance program called ROOM TO GROW. From the word Room we derive caReer, schOol, hOme and Me. The word Me is the focus of the program. Experiences are provided which give more attention to the elementary school child's perception of himself and the image of the person he would like to become. Also much attention is given to the various conditions which operate either to expand or to restrict the child's range of choices. Some of the conditions taken into account are: Attitudes and values toward work - these are acquired quite early in life from identification with one's parents and one's culture; socio-economic

level - social conditions are often the origin of pressure toward or away from certain aspirations; educational expectations - this expectation, often a depressing one, can reinforce an already held low estimate of self - if much is expected of a child, the chances are that he will expect much of himself; self-concept - by this is meant how a child sees himself, how he thinks others see him and the ideal he holds for himself - this is affected to a large extent by a child's contact with the significant people in his life. No one, next to the child's parents, is more significant than his teacher. No one expects children to make decisions about a career before such choices should be made. But this does not mean that the early fantasy choices made in childhood do not have value. Although early choices are usually in a fantasy stage, the teacher's response to the child's announced career hope is likely to affect the child's feeling that he can become somebody and do something that matters.

ROOM TO GROW is conducted once a week for 5th and 6th grade children. In the school year 1967-68 ROOM TO GROW was presented in 54 elementary schools in the School District of Philadelphia, reaching approximately 7,000 children. The program supervised by three guidance consultants, consists of 25-30 weekly sessions that run from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Of the total number of sessions, ten or twelve are suggested as teacher-led guidance projects, twelve or fifteen may be used for guest speakers representing a variety of occupational opportunities and several may be used as tours of business, industry, and area technical schools and colleges. Guidance sessions may last from thirty minutes to an hour and a half, depending upon the children's attention span, interest, and particular needs.

The general objectives of ROOM TO GROW, as seen by the teacher, are to improve self confidence, to provide a wide range of career experiences, and to

develop a desirable approach to the process of career choice. The classroom teacher makes use of the ROOM TO GROW guide[4] which outlines and suggests the scope and sequence of the program. During the teacher guided sessions, the teacher and children may role play an employment interview using a tape recorder, the teacher may present slides provided by local industry showing new career opportunities, she may also use prepared worksheets provided in the ROOM TO GROW guide, to help the children discover more about their particular interests. Or, she may use a prepared survey worksheet to discover what the child hopes to be and what he sees as obstacles to his career hopes. The reasons given by children for selecting or rejecting various career fields are very revealing. One child may say she wants to be a nurse because she wants to help people (most 5th grade girls want to be one of three careers - teachers, nurses, secretaries). A boy may want to become not just a baseball player - but a Phillies baseball player. And there was the boy who indicated that he might not be able to become a lawyer because he talked too much in class. (Children see a relevancy between present behavior and the attainment of future goals). From surveys such as this much is learned by the teacher about the children's self picture. She uses ROOM TO GROW activities as a central point around which she fashions language arts, social studies, arithmetic, etc.

Outside speakers talk about their own lives ("When I was your age I didn't think I would have the money to become an architect"), the satisfactions they get from their careers and generally encourage children to ask questions. This freedom to ask any kind of question is the heart of the ROOM TO GROW program. Children are especially responsive to high school student guest speakers. One especially lively session occurred when students from the commercial course in a nearby high school visited and demonstrated their skills

in typing, shorthand, and the operation of calculating machines. After one such visit, one 5th grade youngster was so stimulated by his experience in operating a typewriter, that in response to a question: "What do you want to be?" replied, "I want to be a typewriter."

The ROOM TO GROW program has been greeted with enthusiasm by children, parents, teachers and resource people representing a broad spectrum of business and industry in Philadelphia. Not only does business and industry cooperate in providing speakers but they have cooperated with the Vocational Guidance Service in the production of career displays, brochures, and audio-visual materials.

The success of the program in reaching many kinds of children has had a dramatic effect. Like the teacher in Sylvia Ashton Warner's novel, 5 The Spinster, children are seen not as black, or brown, or white - but are seen as people. Perhaps the purpose of the program has been best expressed by eleven year old Carmella, who timidly said to her mother: "Mom, I hope you won't get angry, but I want to be an archeologist when I grow up" and Carmella's mother replied, "I'd be delighted!

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